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Meachum's renewed 'hate-mongering'

From the time during the Gulf war Roy Meachum annointed Saddam Hussein as a man who had turned to his Allah and thus was a man of love and peace and I called to the papers' attention that he was giving aid and comfort to the enemy until his "War Story" column (Aug. 9), we have been spared his incitations of hatred toward Israel and his praises of all things Islamic.

As his contrived peg for his renewed hate-Israel preaching, he tells an entirely unrelated story of "earlier this summer," when he had a chance meeting with two American soldiers who had served in Saudi Arabia.

He quotes one as saying "there were things he admired about Islam." What? "Their legal system." Why? Because two American soldiers were accused of rape and the Saudis "cut their heads off."

Two Americans were beheaded after a secret "trial," if by our standards there was what can honestly be referred to as a trial, and our government tolerated that and then did not inform us?

What was the reaction of this man who so often has belabored us with accounts of his international reporting career? Did he phone either the Pentagon or the Saudi Embassy to seek confirmation or denial?

He does admit he was "jolted" but "not particularly surprised."

Instead of making even a pretense of seeking the truth he concludes: "A journalist's overriding responsibility is to the truth" and because "I believe" this story he has met his concept of his "journalist's overriding responsibility."

This is vintage Meachum: Whatever he wants to believe is instant fact.

This story, entirely unrelated, is what led to his renewed assault on Israel as responsible for all the Middle East's tragedies: "I have never forgiven the Israeli government for pulling out of the high ground overlooking the Beirut airport without informing the Marine commander until after the fact. The information lag, thus denied the U.S. forces the opportunity to secure their perimeter from which the suicide bomber drove."

And thus, in Military Expert Meachum's account — not a single word of which is true and relevant — Israel and Jews are responsible for the deaths of more than 200 Marines.

No "high ground" is ever close to an international airport to have been a factor. The bomber did not come from the "high ground." He drove to and through the main barracks entrance. Whether or not the Israelis had told the Marines anything at all is irrelevant because Marines know how to protect themselves and they were sadly neligent and didn't. There was an official investigation but Mr. Meachum could not have cited it and written this hate piece.

No alleged "information lag denied U.S. forces the opportunity to secure" themselves. Tragically, they just failed to do it. In that area where car bombings were commonplace they had only a sentry. Because car bombings were so commonplace and because, still another Meachum omission, the battleship New Jersey had been off the coast bombarding Arab civilian areas with the enormous explosive and destructive power of 16-inch shells, there just was no excuse for the failure to make it impossible to drive a car or a truck into the barracks. Merely parking vehicles as a barrier until a permanent barrier could have been put in place would have saved all those American lives. Moreover, they'd had plenty of time.

It was no "information lag" that can be attributed to the Israelis that led the U.S. command not to take immediately the obviously necessary precautions to prevent retaliation against the senseless Naval bombardment of Arab civilian areas.

With every word of this renewed hate-mongering false, irrelevant or both, as is obvious from what had long been well-known, the papers owe us, at the very least, an apology for permitting the misuse of this

column for its anti-American and hate-inciting purpose.

With Mr. Meachum's renewed boasting of his "journalist" credentials and standards, the papers ought get from him some explanation of why he did not seek official confirmation or denial of the absolute outrage of Americans being beheaded after a secret trial, if any, and of our government then suppressing it.

Mr. Meachum's column defames the papers and is still another of his continuous impositions on the trust of the papers' readers. The one thing this column is not is "journalism." It is hate-mongering.

Whether American heads were cut off, with or without a secret trial, what should be cut off, after too many years of it, is the opportunity Mr. Meachum has to puff himself up, indulge his hates and loves, deceive and mislead your trusting readers, and to publish the inflammatory and outrageous without even the effort that could be expected of a high-school reporter, to ask for official confirmation or denial.

Even a high school kid should know that "I believe" is not fact. This is not justification for publishing the really outrageous. It certainly does not meet "a journalist's overriding responsibility," the single truth in this column, which indeed should be "to the truth."

He has to have known that he was publishing a lie that defames our government and our Gulf military leaders, especially General Norman Schwartzkopf, because, as a former reporter, he has to have known that, were this a true story, he had the most sensational international "scoop," and because the general, those under him and official Washington permitted such an outrage against American soldiers and then suppressed all news of it.

When it comes to the Middle East, truth and Mr. Meachum are strangers.

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